

PETER AND LISA: PART 68

MOVING ON UP

Lisa flops onto the sofa. "God, I'm tired. Can you clone me, Magic Boy, so I can fit all this stuff in?"

"That would be a bad idea."

"Oh, come onnnnnn, one me can be your girlfriend, one can work, one can run the UKAG, one can plan the bloody wedding..."

"All can fight over which one gets which role."

"Why would they? They'd all be me."

"Uh-huh. And you would never fight people to get what you want, would you?"

"I wouldn't fight myself!"

He laughs, "Lise, since you've been with me, half your time has been spent fighting yourself about what you should like vs what you do like."

"That's different!"

"Uh-huh. Besides, long term cloning isn't allowed. It's always caused trouble."

"Long-term... How long is long term?"

"More than a couple of hours. You also have to be really careful with how you reintegrate the clone."

"Reintegrate meaning?"

"Well, if we just let the clone go poof, all its memories go poof with it. If we merge it back in, you've got conflicting memories to process and it gives weird deja-vu as well as a migraine. And the longer it lasts, the more different the clones mind gets which can cause complete..."

"I get it, I get it, no magical cloning solution. Ugh. Fiiiiinnnnne, I'll do it all like a good grown-up!

Wait, what about Hermione Granger Time Twister shenani..." he shakes his head, "Great. How come all the allowed shenanigans are just for kinky sex or making people slaves?"

"Not all of them. Don't you raise your eyebrows at me like that."

"I will if I feel like it."

"Is this a bad time to mention Margaret..."

"Yes. Yes, it is a fucking bad time. And if you said 'yes' it will get worse. For fuck's sake, I'm having enough trouble just doing what I'm doing!"

"I said that to her. She still wants to talk to you."

Lisa buries her face in the cushion and screams. "Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrgggggghhhhhh! For fuck's sake, can that woman not take 'no' for an answer? ...Am I allowed to 'persuade' her that we can't do it this year?"

"As long as you don't make it obvious, sure."

"Really?"

"See? Not everything is about kinky sex. I told you not to raise your eyebrows at me like that. You're not Peter Capaldi."

"And I told you I would if I wanted to." she sighs heavily, "Why is this so hard? All I want to do is help other assistants. Is that so bad?"

"What do you have to do?"

"Well, Tracy's on board, provisionally, so I'll have someone who can run the office, but the computer stuff needs to be set up, and we need an office for her to run..."

"Well, I can help with the computer stuff."

"One tick down." she leans against him, "The office is going to be a pain. I can't use E's, obviously. And begging those pricks at SORM is out."

"Because?"

"Because they're pricks."

"Of course."

"I don't even know where to start. Do estate agents even deal with offices?"

"I may be able to help with that, too."

“Oh, really? And how is that, Magic Boy? Are you an expert in that, too?”

“No. But my Uncle Charlie works in property.”

“Uncle Charlie?”

“I mean, technically, he's my mum's cousin but he's one of the few from her family who still speaks to me, so, do you want me to give him a call?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“If nothing else he can help narrow down what we should be looking for.”

“I guess. Now I've been adulting alllllll day...” she closes the collar around her neck, the slick blackness flowing over her, “...and I need a...huh?”

“Huh??”

“There's a...progress bar? 'Downloading updates'? What?” the surface ripples, “It's not letting me take it off. Interrupting download may compromise user safety...!. Peter...”

“I'm looking...Really?”

“What?!”

“Samhain special options.”

“Magic gets DLC?”

“Looks like it. SAT likes to move with the times.”

“Great. So, what are my brand new spooky options?”

“Let's see, just a list on the promo...Smile!...”

“Suspiciously vague and upbeat.”

“Emoji...”

“Probably the anti-poker face.”

“Too many...”

“Too many what?”

“Just 'too many.’”

“Weird.”

“Immodesty Mode...”

“No. Just no.”

“Drone...”

“See above only more so.”

“Jello...”

“Jello?”

“That's what it says.”

“Ok, that one I'm legitimately curious about but if it involves getting eaten, hard no..”

“Infernal...”

“That better not make me some kind of sexy succubus. Couldn't they have had this thing download while it's a collar?”

“...and finally, Jack O'Lantern. How are you doing?”

“I seem to be done. So, Master, any of those you want to see?” he starts to reply “That I haven't shut down already, you pervert,”

“Let's try smile.”

“Ok, here we gooo0000.” the edges of her mouth pull to the side and keep pulling, stretching almost to her ears, dragging her voice over sharp teeth.

“That's certainly going to make an impressive smile.”

“Yeah.” she starts moving her jaw, “**Feels like I could blow an elephant.**”

“Well, if you want to try that...”

“**Down, Magic Boy.**” she smiles, and her lips part over sharp, pointed teeth, all glistening far too white against her dark suit, that stretch all the way across her face. “**Whoooah, that feels like my head's about to fall off.**”

“Yeah, you look like you're auditioning for Little Shop of Horrors and not as Audrey. I rescind my previous offer.”

“Awww, don't you trust me?”

“Never trust anything with more teeth than the Osmond family.”

“**Wuss.**” She puts her hands against her mouth, feeling the teeth, “**Although you have a point. Those are sharp.**” she pulls her hands back, the gouge across her palm sealing up. She concentrates and the mouth sinks into her skin. A pair of small holes appear under her brows, a line down the middle of her face and a slightly upturned curve where her mouth used to be. She looks round in silence. The upturned curve flips over. It then morphs into a sideways question mark.

“Hang on.” he pulls out his phone, turning it towards her to show her her face. The question mark changes into a small hole. “So you chose emoji.” The blackness flows over the emoticon features leaving her face briefly smooth before her mouth forms.

“Freaky. Not a fan if it enforces the mute like that. Let's see how bad infernal is...” short curved horns push out of her forehead, a serpentine tail ending in a triangular point swishes free from the base of her spine. Her fingers stretch out, longer and sharper than the longest nail extension. Half-inch spikes grow along her shoulders and down her arms and legs. “Oh, this one I like.” she smiles flashing fangs, “And not a leather busier in sight. So, what would you like to see next?”

“Jello?”

“Sure. But no taking samples.” her skin becomes translucent as the sharp edges pull back into her, the couch dimly seen through her. “Somehow I expected more.”

“Do you feel any different?”

“Not really?” she turns and her whole body wobbles as she takes the step. “Ok. That's different. I'll look into that later.” the skin darkens.

“Later?”

“I'm looking for cube time to relax, so we're flying through these. What's left?”

He looks over at the screen. “Jack O'Lantern. Too many. Immodest...”

“No.”

“Then just those two.”

“Ok. Let's try...” her face goes blank again, before two triangles form for her eyes, a jagged grin across her face, all lit by a yellow inner glow, “Jack O...that sounds weird, are you getting an echo, too?”

He nods, “A little.”

“Spooky. Just one left.” her face goes blank and smooth again. She blinks, green eyes looking out of her face, her arms, her legs, her stomach, eyes opening over and over all across her body. “Whoa, that's trippy. I can see everywhere, all around me.” her eyes blink, opening and closing in random patterns across her. She sways a little, putting a hand to her head which only makes the dizziness worse as the eyes along her arm swing their viewpoint rapidly, “Ok, ok, bit too trippy.” the eyes sink back into her black skin, “Oh, there are options. I can have a smaller number, put them specific places. Oh, it could be mouths instead of eyes, or...” she trails off

“Or what?”

“Never you mind 'or what', Magic Boy. They're never going to happen. Now, could you 'wake' me up in an hour? Preferably with chocolate. Pleeceeeeeease?” before he replies, her body is already collapsing, the small black cube resting on the floor.

“Yes, dear.” he replies to the empty room, picking the cube up and placing it on the table.

Later that week, after work, she and Peter are walking up Hatton Garden, stopping between the jewellery stores, their displays gleaming in the lights. “Here we are.”

“There's nothing there, Magic Boy. It's just a wall.”

He knocks on the wall, sounding very wooden for white painted bricks. There's a sound of locks turning. A door opens, a glass-eye in brass peering out.

“Peter Stafford to see Mr Eitrisson.”

The eye glows blue for a moment before retreating behind the door. Clockworks whirr as the door opens wider, revealing a dark corridor. Peter steps in confidently, Lisa less so. She looks to the side, to see a humanoid figure of brass and gears standing behind the door. It's metal skeleton gleams with inner light, its glass eyes shining, clockworks pulling on wires as it moves, jerkily leading

them down the corridor to a constant ticking, interrupted by the heavy metal tread on the floor.. The corridor seems to lead down, and down, and down.

“Where are we going?”

“'tic' The Eitrisson prefers the comforts of earth around him to 'tic' fulfil his work.”

“What does that...”

“We 'tic' are here.” it stops at the thick door, closes its metal fingers around a dark red rope. With pull, a bell tolls inside.

Seconds pass before the door swings open. Filling the lower half of the doorway is a broad-chested figure, as tall as he is wide. His face is wrapped in a beard Brian Blessed would envy, a jeweller's lens secured against one eye under eyebrows like two sedate caterpillars. “Stafford.” he grates with a rumbling bass voice that echoes through the tunnel walls, “And this is the lass, is it? Got a good seam of iron in her, I've heard. Sure you're not going to lose this one, are you?” he steps back, his heavy boots thudding on the bare stone, “Better come in so we can discuss the arrangements. Thank you, Gladys” he walks to the counter on his thick, stubby legs. “Now, wedding bands, is it? Plain, unflashy, I imagine, you aren't the type to go for filigree. You'll be wanting some old gold as the base, obviously. Draupnir-Gelt for prosperity; a smidge of rose for love and fidelity; white for truth and clarity? I can probably slip in a little of the Earth's Bones for security? What inscription were you thinking?”

Lisa blinks. “I'm sorry, what?”

“Figuring out the content and character of the metal, lass. You can't use white gold on a rogue, it'd tarnish. Now, while you think, let me see to the sizings.” he pulls out a pair of calipers, patting a pad on the counter. Lisa puts her hand down, “Now,” he squints through the lens as he places the calipers against her ring finger, making notes, “not bad, for human work, but you're doing the right thing coming to a professional. Hmmmm.” he flicks a lever on the lens, another lens dropping into place, “right, you'll be wanting to keep that, I'm sure, so I'll need more red to hold the magic together. Mmmhmmm, mmmhmmm, we should have enough in stock. Are we thinking different blends? Or going for the same to keep you together?”

“The same.”

He purses his thick cracked lips, “Going to need so make sure the mana balances. That'll take another fitting for adjustments.” his fingers work over an abacus as he continues to take measurements. “Come back in three weeks with the inscription.”

“What about the price?”

“Ha. If you have to ask the price, lass, you can't afford my work. It'll be sorted, don't you worry. Be off now, I've got gold to work.”

They make their way up the tunnel, back out into the crisp autumn air. Lisa sighs heavily, as Gladys closes the door behind them “Something *else* to think about.”

A regular day in the office, a few days later, Lisa picks up her phone as it pulls her out of the spreadsheet., “Lisa McCagherty.”

“Am I speaking to the Lisa stepping out with my boy, Peter Stafford?”

“Let's say you are. Who is this?”

“Charles Montgomery Fortesque-Smythe, at your service, what.”

“Charles...Peter's Uncle Charlie?”

“The one and very same. So, what can I do for you? As usual, Peter was a bit clipped on the details. But he so rarely asks for something, I'm intrigued.”

“I'm looking for premises and...”

“Ah, right, professional services hat on. What's your budget like?”

“Uhm...very low.”

“Riiiiight. Staff size?”

“Uhm, 3 maybe 4.”

“That suits a low budget, what? Standard office? No manufacturing, food preparation or anything?”

“Standard office.”

“Good, good. Open plan?”

“Sure. We might need a private room.”

There's a sucking of teeth on the other end of the line. “That...complicates matters. How far out are we talking? Obviously prices change depending on proximity. Location, location, location, what.”

“It...it doesn't have to be that central. But still somewhere in London”

“Capital. Ha. No? As you please.”

“Sorry. First time doing offices and I'm supposed to be doing my day job.”

“Riiiiight. Mum's the word. Well, give me a, hmmm, at least a few days, this is on the qt, after all, and I'll find some options and we can see what's what, what.”

“Right, right.”

“And tell that feckless nephew of mine to come out and see his old uncle at some point before I forget what he looks like, what.”

Lisa closes the call, “I'll add it to the list.” she mutters, “Dealing with property agents, Lise, you're moving up in the world. Lucky you.”